

A Grandmother's Lesson

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After leaving home and living by myself, my grandmother from my mother's side often comes to mind. Two years ago, spring, she quietly passed away from infirmity — at just a bit over seventy years old.

I lived alone in Tokyo for a long time many years ago when I was still a student, but I was sure to return home once every week. This frequently was a bit strange. I was one of those lazy students pretty rare back in those days, but because it wasn't like I had anything to do on the weekend, I would always return home on Saturday, and go back to Tokyo promptly the morning of the following Monday. In front of my mother and grandmother, I indirectly put on the airs of a virtuous student, which at the same time acted as the wedge that condemned my own indolence. Once when I was forced to repeat a year, while many lazy students had heroic virtues of some sort, I had no such redeeming traits and was very timid. Greatly flustered and somewhat disillusioned about the world, I rushed to my grandmother's side before anything else. Yet when I got there I didn't barge into her room right away, and stood still outside in the hall.

"Who is it? The one standing over there!"

"..."

"Are you some John Doe? Or some burglar?"

"It's me," I said hurriedly in a soft voice.

"Oh! What an interesting name. Even after all these years I've never met a person named 'Me.' Well Me, come inside. That's the corner where you're standing."

... You have this bad habit. When you're in Tokyo you'll probably visit others with that face of yours. The only time you can't state your name is when you slice your stomach and die. It's proper etiquette to give your name when asked. Whenever you speak to others, you should first introduce yourself... The usual sermon. I got scolded by my grandmother once again. From the age of 5 up until now, my 20-something self has probably visited my grandmother upwards of 4000 times, yet there was not a single time I stated my name and received her acknowledgement.

"Please don't tell my parents about me failing the grade."

"Why would I ever speak of a man's request? It'd be even better if you hadn't told me in the first place," she replied as she tightly pressed her lips together. I think I saw her swallow a tear.

... Just because it's you I'll tell you this. Never ask people to keep things secret. Stupidity is not embarrassing. When you get angry, go all out. Don't meddle in the affairs of others. I don't know where you'll work after you graduate, and I probably won't even be alive by then, but if you become blinded by greed and sell your heart and do things beyond yourself, I'll tell you off again from beneath the grave! Even being poor is no shame. If you start working but can't please your superiors and they tell you to leave, then so be it. You can always come home and work at the town hall so please live your life with dignity. Don't ever

associate with friends who laugh at others for wearing cotton clothes. As for your grades, I'll take responsibility for them.

Being accepted by her so plainly as if she saw through my lonely inclinations annoyed me slightly, but I just meekly nodded. Thanks to her things ended without my parents finding out about me failing the grade. Sometime after I opened up to my mother and apologized about the situation, but my father probably still knows nothing. Rather, he's the type of person who's completely indifferent towards matters like what school his son goes to, what he studies, or when he graduated. If I carelessly started to talk seriously about something as if I wanted to exercise some filial piety — well I don't know what would happen because I've never done anything like that — he'd probably have a blank expression and just look away. So I purposely stay quiet, but if his eyes came upon these very words he might get a bit of a shock.

I feel that I can write a lot of things about my grandmother whenever I think of her. But it's not as if I have any particularly strong impressions of her, so writing these types of paragraphs about her also proves to be somewhat tricky.

Anyhow, I happen to be living alone in Tokyo once again, and thoughts of her come again. For example, it's been four or five days since the last time I took a bath, so I decided to go to the public bathhouse. However, after looking through the coins in my pouch, I realized I didn't have the exact change. I gave up on my valuable bathing experience. *No matter if you're still a student, you must never take change from bathhouses or barbers when you go to Tokyo. For these places, you must always separate your money into the fee and tip before heading out.* She would say these cautionary words to me at the front door whenever I left for Tokyo, some many years ago. I don't think there's anyone who specially prepares a tip for the bathhouse, though.

I lied on my bed face-up and stared at the ceiling. It's not like I wanted to honour her words — rather it was merely an act of indolence. I thought about the messages she left me, forgot about the sadness that accompanied a lack of bathing, and indulged in my afternoon nap with a wry smile.